

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from South Dakota (Ms. HERSETH SANDLIN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. HERSETH SANDLIN addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. DEFAZIO addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. CUMMINGS addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. SARBANES) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. SARBANES addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

IRAQ

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CARTER) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. CARTER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the Speaker for recognizing me for this hour. We are up here this evening because I have had a chance to go to Iraq recently, and some of the things that I have heard in the House just a few minutes ago don't ring up with what I observed when I was in Iraq.

But I want to start off by saying this: When I went back home this past month, all over my district the main thing I heard from the people on Iraq, get the politics out of it and just tell us the truth of what you know and let us try to figure it all out together, and why don't we try to figure this out together instead of thinking about who is going to win the next election or who is going to get the next advantage in the political process. I kept hearing that over and over.

I want to get up, and some of my colleagues tonight are going to talk about what they know. Some of them have a lot more wisdom than I do because

they have been there more times than I have and have had more experiences.

My experience is relatively limited. I have been to Iraq four times since I have been in Congress, the last time being late in the month of July. I went on a long weekend to Iraq. So I was there the first time right after we caught Saddam Hussein. The second time I was there was just before the elections took place. The third time was May a year ago when we were pondering what to do and there was discussion of Petraeus having a plan. And then recently this July.

I can tell you that the difference between May and July is the difference between daylight and dark as far as the comments that I received from American fighting men and women and from Iraqis that I visited with while I was there for what was just a real long weekend.

Soldiers are always proud of their mission and accept their mission, and they do their mission and duty and we should always be proud of them. But you didn't hear the kind of comments that we have heard now about the enthusiasm that our soldiers have for the fact that ordinary Iraqi citizens, as we say in baseball, are stepping up to the plate and they are taking a swing, and that swing is helping our soldiers and our marines as they do their duty to try to eliminate al Qaeda from being that thorn in the side of Iraqi freedom that is causing the ultimate cause of all of this violence that is going on in Iraq.

Someone here tonight said there is brazen political maneuvers. Well, what I am saying has nothing to do with politics. It has to do with the fact that within my district, I have 52,000 soldiers who reside within my district, all of whom have been deployed at least once and some as many as three times in Iraq. I have the largest military facility that exists in the United States, Fort Hood.

Our guys told us a lot of good news, and I will report the bad news. The bad news they told us is that 15 months is tough and it is hard on their families and they hope we can get this mission done so we don't have to continue 15-month rotations.

So I don't come back just preaching good news. Our military, our soldiers don't like the 15-month rotation, but they do their duty. But time and time again I had soldiers tell me: Man, whatever you do, don't pull the rug out from under us just as we are starting to see daylight. We are committed in blood, sweat and tears over here, and the Nation has committed its resources and we are seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. Don't pull out the rug now. If you do, don't ask me to come back when this place goes to hell in a handbasket. That is a quote from a sergeant.

We have to think about this. We have big decisions to make this fall. General Petraeus is going to come over here, and he will tell us the truth about what

is going on, and I don't think it is all going to be a beautiful, rosy picture. But I do think he is going to tell you what ordinary soldiers and ordinary marines told me, and that is, as compared to 6 to 9 months ago, it is substantially better. It has to do with the fact that we now have the necessary troops on the ground.

I would like to correct an error that a general asked me to correct. The surge did not start in February of this year. The surge was announced. The surge started the second week in July of this year. That is when the entire 30,000-soldier contingency was in Iraq, and at that point in time the plan began to be executed.

But the idea that we were building up troops brought good news. The surge is now less than 6 weeks old. That's the truth about what the surge is. In fact, one of the people who is in charge of bringing these additional forces to Iraq told me, he said: You know, I hear you are having votes to pull out in 2 weeks or 2 months. Well, just tell somebody it took us a hard 6 months to get 30,000 soldiers over here, and if you think you can move 160,000 out of here in 120 days, you have lost your mind. It can't be done.

The reality of that war is they come over there on ships, and just like they did in the Second World War, they train before they go in, and when they are ready, they go in. And the whole 30,000 finally arrived in July.

So the picture, as I see it, is good news because of Iraqi involvement, and we will talk some more about that. Right now I would like to recognize CHRIS SHAYS, my colleague who has probably been to Iraq more than any Member of this Congress. Congressman SHAYS, do you want to share your feelings.

Mr. SHAYS. I appreciate you holding this very important dialogue about Iraq. I appreciate your taking this Special Order to share what many of us have seen in Iraq.

I want to say that I go where the truth takes me, even if it counters something I believed and thought. I just go where the truth takes us. There is no question that 2003 was not a good year. When we attacked Iraq, there was tremendous euphoria and then we made mistake after mistake after mistake. Those have already been discussed. Half of 2004 wasn't particularly good, but when we transferred power to the new Iraqi Government, the Iraqi people, we began to see noticeable changes.

And then 2005 was a pretty amazing year. They had an election to create a government that would form a constitutional convention. They met the deadline to form a constitutional convention. They wrote their Constitution and adopted it in a plebiscite throughout Iraq, and then they elected a government under that new Constitution. So 2005 was a pretty astonishing year, a very successful year.

They basically had 18 months of progress from the deep hole we dug in

2003 and part of 2004, and then came 2006. It took them 4 months to establish a government, and then the Maliki government didn't do the kind of heavy lifting we were hoping they would do.

□ 2030

I took a position that I took then and hold today, that we need to prod the Maliki government. I believe the timeline is important, but not a timeline based on basically pulling the rug out from them and just leaving. We attacked them. They didn't attack us. We got rid of all their army, their police and their border patrol. We left them totally defenseless in a country where all their prisoners were let out, and then we would walk away? The neighbors to Iraq said we may not have wanted you to go in, in fact, said we did not want you to go in, but it would be an outrage if you left. And so now this is where we're at. Do we leave now? Do we leave sometime in the future? What do we do?

I think that what we knew we needed to do was have a new Secretary of Defense. That's what the American people asked. That's what some of us wanted to see happen, and we got someone who wasn't tied to the past in Mr. Gates. Then I think all of us were hoping and praying that Mr. Petraeus would be the general in charge to serve under Secretary of Defense Mr. Gates. General Petraeus who had been there three times, been involved in this effort, and knows Iraq cold and knows the insurgency concerns extraordinarily well, given that he spent a year of his life just studying it. He basically said, give me more people to see what we could do in the greater Baghdad area. It was referred to as "the surge." He said give me more troops; we need to establish some security, and then we'll re-appraise. And now we're coming to that point.

When I was there in December last year, they said we have lost Anbar province. We've just given up on it. We have no troops. It's totally in the hands of al Qaeda, and it sounded to me like a mini-Afghanistan. I go back in April. He said, we're winning Anbar province. I said, what do you mean you are winning Anbar province? You told me you'd given up on it. Well, the Sunni tribal leaders came to us, said we want al Qaeda defeated, we want your help, come on in and we will work with you.

That's what happened. It was a model that wasn't part of the surge, but then when I went back in May, he said the surge is working; we're starting to see some progress from the full complement in July. And when I went back this past August, they said the story is the surge is continuing to go in the right direction, and we have won Anbar province, and we are winning some of the other Sunni provinces. The tribal leaders have bought in to what happened in Anbar and said we want the same thing.

It's almost like, to some of my colleagues in this Chamber, that to say

the surge is working and to say that there is progress, it's like they're angry and disappointed: how dare you say that. You had Mr. BAIRD, a Democrat, who voted against going into Iraq, who said what he saw, and he goes where the truth takes him, was that there is progress, and it would be a mistake to leave prematurely.

So this is what we're going to be debating. Do we leave right now or leave by April of next year or do we maintain the surge a little longer? We know we're ultimately going to bring a good number of our troops home. We can't maintain that surge, and Mr. CARTER's right. I have heard more of my constituents who serve in the military and those who don't, who I've met in Iraq. They said we could accept 12 months. Fifteen months is just too much. And I've had parents, they've come up to me, and they never did this in the past. They kind of put their arm around me. They whisper in my ear practically, and they say, my son or my daughter is in Iraq and they're exhausted.

We know that we have to reduce the workload of these troops. We have to start to tell Prime Minister Maliki what he needs to know, and I'll conclude by making this point: we can lecture Prime Minister Maliki all we want. We can do that if we don't mind being the biggest hypocrites around. So why would I say that? Well, we say, why don't you Sunni, Shias and Kurds get your act together, and I'm thinking, Republicans and Democrats can't even work together on this.

We have asked our Democratic colleagues to allow for some amendments, bipartisan amendments, amendments that would have support on both sides of the aisle. They don't want it. They have simply refused to allow any Republican amendment or any amendment that even their own side wants that would have attraction to Republican Members.

Too many on that side of the aisle want to continue to make this a partisan issue when the fact is we went into Iraq on a bipartisan basis, two-thirds of the House of Representatives, three-quarters of the Senate. The only way we're going to successfully disengage in a way that will enable the Iraqis to stand on their own and bring our troops home is if we do it on a bipartisan basis. I'm prepared to vote for some things that I don't want if it is a bipartisan effort that will ultimately lead to some common ground.

So I just want to say that it strikes me that we ask our troops to risk their lives. They have one request from us, that we, Republicans and Democrats, start working together for the common good of this country. That's their one request, and it strikes me that when we lecture Prime Minister Maliki, he's trying to run a government by consensus, Sunni, Shias and Kurds, all agreeing to take action. He could cut out the Sunnis and just simply agree with the Kurds, and they could run the government. The Shias and Kurds, they

could get their more than 50 percent vote, but he is making a sincere effort to try to find common ground.

I thank my colleague for having this Special Order. I'd like to listen to my other colleagues, maybe jump back in, but my report to this Congress is this surge is working. My report to this Congress is that the tribal Sunni leaders that have asked us to help have seen a tremendous benefit in their provinces, and that has benefited them. It's benefited the Iraqi people, and it's benefited our troops. And so I can't say what will happen two months from now or four months from now; but as God is my witness, we are seeing progress in Iraq, as much as some of my colleagues don't want me to say that.

Mr. CARTER. Well, I thank my colleague for those very, very intelligent comments and for your experience. How many trips have you made?

Mr. SHAYS. I go every 3 to 4 months, and I've been there 18 times.

Mr. CARTER. Eighteen times. Well, my little four don't sound like a whole lot.

Mr. SHAYS. Well, you've been going more recently. I got elected before you.

Mr. CARTER. Well, that's true. I want to thank you and I'm sure our soldiers want to thank you, too.

The trip that I was on, I had some wonderful Members of Congress who are here. A couple of them are here tonight. My friend Mr. DAVIS from Tennessee was there with us, and I believe that was his first trip to Iraq. I would like to yield to Mr. DAVIS.

Mr. DAVID DAVIS of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank my friend from Texas for yielding and thank you for giving me the opportunity to visit Iraq.

Being from Tennessee, the Volunteer State, I volunteered to visit the men and women in uniform in Iraq. I wasn't disappointed. Our troops are well trained, well motivated, and successful.

After the fall of Saddam, the Iraqi people had a choice to make. They have lived for decades under totalitarian rule. Over the past 4 years, they've been divided and, quite frankly, confused about who their friends and allies really are. Is it the radical extremists such as al Qaeda or is it us?

During my visit to Iraq, I visited Ramadi, which until a few months ago was a killing field. For the past 4 years, the people of Ramadi were caught in a decision-making battle of which group, us or the extremists, offered them the best chance for a normal and free future.

The insurgent extremist chose to win the local people over with the use of force, force against their American troops and against any local who did not support their radical agenda. Our troops, on the other hand, have reached out in friendship and support.

The local people, seeing the difference, have chosen to have their lives returned to normal and live in freedom. Therefore, Ramadi has gone from a city of death and destruction to one of

rebuilding and hope. I was able to see it firsthand during my visit in July.

As I walked throughout the busy city market, it was very uplifting to see the local people interacting with our American troops in a very positive way. Now that the surge is under way, our troops are actually living in the city as trusted friends and allies. We're working with the local mayor and his directors to rebuild and totally rejuvenate the city. The city of Ramadi is located in al Anbar, a city that Chris just mentioned moments ago as being a lost hope at the end of the year.

Of course, these relationships take time to develop, but the time and effort are worth it. Helping the Iraqi people secure their freedom helps us to defeat global extremists and, therefore, secure our own freedoms for generations to come.

We have to be successful as well. Ronald Reagan once said, "We win, they lose." If we choose not to succeed, that statement will be just the opposite: we lose, they win.

You may ask, who are they and why does it matter to me anyway? They are not the Iraqi people. I had the opportunity to meet with some of them during my visit. The Iraqi people are really no different than any of us. They want to live in a secure and safe country, have a job to go to in the mornings, be able to clothe and feed their families, walk across the street without fear of being shot or blown up, find reasonable health care, and to worship freely. These are the same things that any American mother and father would want for their children.

So who are our enemy in Iraq and other parts of the world? They're radical extremists who are willing to kill innocent men, women and even children to spread their ideology of hate.

We, the American people, have been lulled into believing that this is the President's war on the Iraqi people. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Iraqi people and the Iraqi Government see us as liberators from an oppressive regime, but they are just now learning how to live as a free people. Our common enemy do not want them to live free and productive lives. That would go against their ideology of hate, an ideology that they want to spread around the world, perhaps to a neighborhood near you.

We cannot let that happen. We either win and they lose, or they win and we lose. That is too big a price to pay. This Congress owes it to everyone involved to succeed, from the Iraqi people to our brave men and women in uniform who are serving on the frontlines of battle, to the American people. We cannot afford to lose. The price is too high and the cost is too much. Freedom isn't free. It has to be earned. It has to be cherished.

We're in a fight for the generations that will come after us. This battle isn't about a small hot desert land somewhere in the Middle East that most Americans will never visit or

even easily find on a globe. This battle is about our future and that of our children and grandchildren.

We want the same things for our children that Iraqi mothers and fathers do for their children. We want to live in a secure and safe country, to have a job to go to in the mornings, be able to clothe and feed our families, walk across the street without having the fear of being blown up or shot, find reasonable health care and to worship freely. But our enemy, the radical extremists, want to deny us and our future generations those freedoms. They have proved it time and time again: for instance, the Iranian hostage crisis in 1979 where 52 Americans were held for 444 days, or the bombing of the Marine Corps barracks in Beirut where 241 marines lost their lives in 1983, or the first bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993, or the attack on the USS *Cole* claiming the lives of 17 sailors, or the deadly attack on September 11, where almost 3,000 Americans died.

We can either choose to fight and win the battle now or choose to lose the battle now and leave it for our children to fight.

A sentiment relayed to me by a general in Iraq was very simple, and it drove this point home. Our men and women in uniform are not fighting only for the 8-year-old Iraqi child and their security but also for the 8-year-old American child and for their current and future security and freedom. We do not want them to grow up to have to fight this battle that we chose not to finish.

As I mentioned, our enemy has proven they're dedicated and willing to shed American blood on American soil. Do we really want to tie our hands to the point that we encourage failure over success in Iraq in this global war on terror? Do we really want to live in an America where our future generations have to fear going to the park, going to the mall, going to school or to work? I don't think so and I sure hope not.

□ 2045

The choice is ours today. The American people, when provided with the facts, will choose freedom and security every time. I say, we win, they lose. The cost to the American family is just too great to allow any other outcome.

May God bless America and keep her strong and secure for generations to come.

Mr. CARTER. I thank my colleague from Tennessee. We had a great experience on that trip.

One of my good buddies up here and colleagues is PHIL GINGREY from Georgia. Congressman GINGREY has a more recent trip than the trip I was on in July. I believe Congressman GINGREY just got back a couple weeks ago.

So he will tell us about his experience on a trip that took place early in August and let him tell us what he saw and how he feels about things.

Mr. GINGREY. I thank the gentleman, my good friend from Texas.

It is indeed an honor to be a part of this special leadership hour to share a little time with my colleagues, of course, Judge Carter leading the hour; CHRIS SHAYS, the gentleman from Connecticut, 18 trips to the Middle East, to some extent in harm's way.

I saw a couple of years ago, maybe it was 3 years ago, just happened to be channel surfing, watching C-SPAN. I guess I am an insomniac. There was CHRIS SHAYS having a town hall meeting talking to his constituents from Connecticut and taking some tough, the tough questions about this situation in the Middle East and why it was important and why he supported it. He outlined tonight the fact that he doesn't look at these things through rose-colored glasses. He understands that mistakes were made. We all do, but the mission is the mission.

He went on and talked about this surge and why it's so important that every Member on both sides of the aisle give it a chance to work. Judge Carter said the same thing, pointed out that this surge of 30,000 troops wasn't even complete until the beginning of July. Yet, many of our colleagues, unfortunately, it seemed like most of them on the other side of the aisle, wanted to declare that the new way forward was a failure before it even started, before it had even begun.

I remember back when I first came, I had the honor to come to this body with some of my colleagues that are here tonight on the floor, and people saying, well, you know, this mistake, the big mistake is we didn't put enough troops on the ground. I guess that's what General Shinseki had recommended. My Democrat colleagues kept pounding away, well, we didn't have enough troops.

Then when the President, based really on the report of the Iraq Study Group, two of the most distinguished public servants in the Federal Government that any of us know, James Baker, Lee Hamilton, a Republican and a Democrat, came and said, you know, we need a surge of troops, that's exactly what the President did. And then my colleagues on the Democrat side of the aisle, most of them, not all, said, too little, too late.

How do you satisfy some folks? I listened very carefully, of course, to my good friend and colleague, a freshman, but he seemed so much more experienced, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DAVID DAVIS), talking about if we lose, they win. He is absolutely right. That just is so simple but yet so profound, and I really compliment the gentleman from Tennessee making his first trip and having that insight, that wisdom we all pray for. That's what we need for us to win.

Indeed, this is tough; it's not easy. But I heard some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle during the 5-minute remarks tonight, I heard the gentlelady from California say it was unconscionable that the President is playing politics with the war in Iraq;

yet she, as a cofounder of the Out of Iraq Caucus, and many of her colleagues voted in favor before the August recess of every one of these, let's see if we can tie General Petraeus' hands behind his back.

So, surely they don't want us to do poorly in Iraq. Surely not. I don't suggest that. But I just remind them that this Commander in Chief, I may not agree with him on every single thing. I think the issue of stem cell research is something I support him on. Some of my colleagues on this side of the aisle do not. His thoughts about a comprehensive immigration reform that includes what I think is amnesty, I don't support him on. Some of my colleagues on this side of the aisle do. But I can I think in the final analysis, this President, it may take 25 years, it may take 50 years, but I believe people will look back and say thank God that this man was in this place at this time after 9/11 and had the courage to stand up to finally say, you know, double-dog daring and triple-dog daring doesn't work.

Mr. DAVIS talked about the marine barracks and the USS Cole and the hostages in Iran for the 400 and something days, the 52 hostages. This President, this Commander in Chief had the courage to stand strong.

Now, my colleague just mentioned I had gotten back from Iraq, my fourth trip. I will probably never catch Mr. SHAYS. But each and every trip, honestly, I think I learn more and more. I want my colleagues to understand that. These trips, I hope the American people will listen. These trips are bipartisan. We go and, you know, we hear the facts. And the old saying, you are entitled to your own opinion, but you are not entitled to your own facts.

But I feel very strongly that General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker are going to come back and come to us as required by law, which we insisted on September 15, at least by that date, maybe a little bit before that date, and give us an accurate, fair, balanced report.

They are not going to try to paint this picture too bright. They are going to be accurate. I have said all along, we need to wait for that report before we all try to become 535 commanders in chief, many of us, including myself, who are not even veterans.

So I was very encouraged, I said to my colleague, Representative CARTER, on my trip, I think the troops are strong, absolutely. As Representative SHAYS said, they get weary, the families get weary. The American public is a little impatient. I understand that. War fatigue does set in. But this is not the time to give up. This is the time to be tough, stand strong and give victory a chance, because Mr. DAVIS said, if we don't, they win. The consequences of that are unfathomable.

As I conclude my remarks, I also want to say to a group of marines from my district, NAS Atlanta, deployed this morning, some of them for the third time. This is the "Red Dogs"

HMLA-773, a squadron of 255 marines. They are helicopter guys, Mr. Speaker, and they are light attack helicopters. They are going to be in a situation there at the al Assad Air Base. The President just made the trip over Labor Day weekend to meet with the troops. That's where they are going.

I saw them with their families, with their wives, with their little infant children. In one case, a little baby 2 weeks old was there in his mother's arms. There were cousins, there were aunts, there were uncles, and there were brothers and sisters and grandparents. It humbled me to stand among these heroes as I talked with them and told them how much, how deeply I think Members on both sides of the aisle appreciate their dedicated service to this country.

I wish them Godspeed and hope they will come back safe and sound to their loved ones.

But not one of them wavered, even though this may have been their second or third deployment. They are still strong, and that's the same thing that I saw when I went to Iraq on this recent trip.

God bless them. Let's hang in there for a little while longer. Then we are going to hear from General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker on September 15, and it will be an encouraging bit of news.

Mr. CARTER. I told everybody about that trip to Iraq. The man who led that trip to Iraq is here, Congressman MIKE BURGESS, one of my classmates, came into Congress with me. He is from the great State of Texas, the northern part of our State, from the Dallas-Ft. Worth-Denton area.

Congressman BURGESS was the leader of our group that went over for our long weekend. Congressman BURGESS may tell us about the trip and has pictures to look at.

Mr. BURGESS. Let me respectfully point out we call that the Dallas-Ft. Worth area back where I come from.

I am going to reiterate many of the points that have already been made tonight. It's hard to not cover ground that's already been covered.

This was my sixth trip to the country of Iraq. I was there a year ago. We went in July, toward the end of July, a weekend trip, as Mr. CARTER already pointed out. I didn't know it was possible to do a weekend trip to Baghdad but, indeed, it is if the circumstances are correct.

The year before I was there and heard about some of the things that were happening in a hospital, a little town called Ramadi. General Peter Chiarelli, as I recall, said, I am not sure what this means and probably too early to talk about it, but it seems as if we have been invited into the hospital, which was one of the main headquarters of the insurgents, the Sunni insurgents there in Ramadi, and the building was turned over without firing a shot.

A year later, the situation is completely reversed, and Ramadi was so

stable that not only could we talk about visiting it, we, indeed, did visit. It is that trip that really embodies the success that has occurred and, largely, the success that has occurred since beginning the additional troop strength in February and, of course, the ascension of General David Petraeus to be the commander of the forces in Iraq.

The fact is, I don't think you can deny that significant successes have been made and they continue to occur on an ongoing basis, returning control of the country to the Iraqi Government and to its people and delivering it out of the hands of criminals and murderers. But I don't think any of us would disagree. It's still a very dangerous situation and the sacrifice that's being made by all participants in the country is very, very real.

It is my opinion, and I spoke on the floor of this House right before we had the decision to support the President on the surge, it is my opinion that it is in America's broad interest that we be successful in this endeavor. It is also my opinion that it is, indeed, possible for us to be successful.

Nothing that I saw on this trip would discourage me from either one of those points. It is my opinion that a stable country in Iraq, with a representational government that's able to act as a partner in peace in the Middle East, would be vastly preferable to a lawless land ruled by terrorists, criminals, with sources and training capabilities where they would be able to expand their activities, not just to other areas of Iraq but, indeed, to other areas of the Middle East and, indeed, to other areas of the world.

Almost without question, the divergent future, the potential divergent future of that country was on the minds of almost everyone we encountered during that very brief 2-day trip. Certainly America's interest is going to be best served by stability in the country and their active participation in quieting a very troubled region.

In July of 2006, there was no way that we could have taken a congressional delegation into Ramadi. It would have been too dangerous, and we would have been turned down had we asked. But this time we got off of the C-130 in Baghdad and loaded onto the Black Hawk helicopters, and we were taken to Ramadi.

We met with the soldiers there. We met with the soldiers of the II Marine Expeditionary Force, which are part of the surge. General Gaston, who I believe is on the pictures with President Bush over the weekend, was part of that briefing that we had there, met the mayor, met the health minister.

The mayor of Ramadi sounded like a mayor in any one of the 60 cities that are in my district. He said, I need more Federal money. By the way, if you come back and visit next year, this place is really going to be something, so plan on coming back and spending some money when you get here. He sounded like a combination mayor and

chamber of commerce guy, but he really believed in what he was doing.

I guess, of all of the things that I didn't expect to find when I got to Iraq this time, it was that slow building of the institutions of local government, which previously had been lacking, that building of the institutions of government at the local level, which heretofore I had not witnessed on any of the trips that I had made to Iraq. That was the thing that probably gives me the most hope for what the overall future for that country may entail.

□ 2100

When we got to Ramadi, we had our briefings. We had our visits with the health director and the mayor. And then we went downtown. We went to an area that previously was involved in very, very heavy ground fire and ground fighting for the control of that city.

Remember, Ramadi is a city about the size of Fort Worth, Texas. It's about 400,000 to 500,000 people. It was designated to be the provincial capitol of the resurgent caliphate in western Iraq.

Well, we walked through the market, and it looks like a very normal market in a Middle Eastern country. And you can see the look on the faces of the people there. They're curious about people walking through their market. Clearly, we did not look like we were typical shoppers. But you see the faces of the children there, inquisitive and friendly.

A lot of stuff available for sale there, much more than I would have thought in an area that had been recently so hard pressed.

One of the very striking things to me again is the faces of the children, very energetic, very engaged, very trusting. These two young men came right up to us. I think they were interested in if we had any pens or quarters. Clearly, the close association with the American military has taught them a few things about life in this country.

But clearly, a very different picture on the street in Ramadi than you would have encountered a year ago.

From a military perspective, there's no question that success has been made and continues to be made on a near daily basis. The primary enemy, which is al Qaeda in Iraq, has not only been beaten but they've been vanquished every time there is an encounter. Al Qaeda has now about three options: they can move, communicate, or shoot. And if they do any one of those three things, they are met by our military, and they are dispatched.

Because of the increased military presence of our troops in Iraq, the confrontations are more frequent, and you see that reflected in statistics coming out of that country.

From the government perspective, there's not a Sunday morning that goes by that we don't hear someone complain about the government in Iraq, and I'll do the same thing. It's as-

tounding to me that a country that young, a government that young can already have entrenched bureaucracies that exist within it. Iraq has a very centralized government.

But, again, I would stress the building up of the work that's going on currently of that sort of bottom-up work of building governments does seem to be a cause for some optimism.

Probably this conflict, unlike any other in our Nation's history, there are data points which are distributed all over the map. And anybody can take a handful of those data points and make whatever conclusion, draw whatever conclusion they have in their mind to make. It is going to take a lot more discipline for this body to look at the trends, analyze the data trends, look at the trend lines. But that's a discipline that we just have to undertake. There are people in the field who are counting on us to be able to make that rational, dispassionate assessment of trend lines; and it is the obligation of Congress to follow through on that.

There have been two or three years of serious brutality at the hands of al Qaeda, and this population now sees Americans as helpers and protectors. The tribal leaders that originally feared that the Americans would be occupiers quickly came to understand that the Americans have no such interest, but the same could not be said for the al Qaeda interests. Their clear intent was to hold territory for their own purposes for the foreseeable future.

The point was made over and over again on our trip that there is no easy, there is no overnight solution to the problems that confront us in Iraq. Unfortunately, leadership cannot be bought, and it has to be grown. It has to be part of an evolutionary change. But it can occur if the right environment is provided and appropriate, but not indefinite, time is given to develop those institutions of government.

Everything we have asked of our military they have delivered, they have produced for us. What we have asked of the Iraqi Government is still a work in progress, and we've set a pretty high bar. And it's a much shorter time frame than even our own country had available to it.

I think of the Articles of Confederation that ultimately led up to the Constitution. What if someone had said to us, time's up, and you've just got to get it done?

With continued pushing on the Iraqi Government and the recognition that there are cultural challenges before them, I am hopeful that it can mature into a stable partner for peace in the Middle East.

My opinion, my conclusion is that our presence in Iraq is still necessary. It's necessary for America's interests, not for Iraq's interests. I've said, and I think everyone in our group said every time we'd sit down with representatives from one of the ministries, you've got to show some evidence of success. You've got to achieve some benchmarks.

I think when we met with Dr. Sharistani, the oil minister, it's probably most evident. They've got problems in trying to achieve these benchmarks. Not every country that surrounds them is interested in Iraq being successful. Yeah, we all know about Iran and their influence; read more about it today. We all know about Syria and their influence.

But what about the Saudis? Do they have an interest in perhaps not getting that oil revenue sharing law passed? Well, this was brought up to us. It would have never occurred to me that this might be an obstacle to getting that law passed and enacted, but apparently there are some forces, and maybe even just some media forces within that country that work in a detrimental way to that kind of progress. But progress has to come and it has to be clearly evident for those on the outside. We perhaps have asked them to achieve the impossible in such a short time frame. But, again, many of us here tonight have made multiple trips to Iraq. Every trip I've made, I have seen progress, evidence of significant progress since the trip before. And I have no doubt that that progress has continued since our trip there the latter part of July.

Again, my opinion: it is in America's interest that we be successful. And to answer the question, is success still a possibility, I don't think there's any question after this last trip. The answer to that is a resounding yes.

I'll yield back to the gentleman from Texas, and I truly appreciate him calling this Special Order tonight.

Mr. CARTER. I thank my friend for his comments tonight. He led a really great congressional delegation over there.

My friend from Louisiana (Mr. BOUSTANY) is here. He just came in. And I would like to hear what he has to say about his experience in dealing with this issue of the war in Iraq. I yield whatever time he may consume.

Mr. BOUSTANY. I thank my friend, the gentleman from Texas, for yielding time.

Let me start by saying, first, I want to thank our troops, our embassy personnel, State Department personnel and all their families for the sacrifices that they've dealt with as we've dealt with this problem in Iraq, this challenge that we're faced with.

I've come away from a trip just this past week and recognize that I truly believe that General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker are going to come forward with a very independent, unvarnished report about what's going on in Iraq. We're going to see what's working and what's not working, and I appreciate that. And I think that's going to be the most important report that this Congress will look at to determine how do we move forward; what steps should we take as a Congress with this situation in Iraq.

With that having been said, this past year was very difficult. We saw a lot of

violence. I know at the beginning of 2006, Iraq was really threatening to spiral out of control with violence. Some described it as anarchic fragmentation, which was really a very visual term for what was potentially going to happen in Iraq.

And when the President announced his surge strategy back in I think it was late December, I have to say I was very skeptical because I kept thinking, what's next? A surge is fine. We can get more troops in. The Iraq Study Group actually agrees that this could be a temporary measure to gain security. But what do we do following that to get political gains in Iraq? What can be done to help develop the economy in Iraq? These were the key issues to me.

Then it became clear, subsequently, that our State Department was working on a plan to deal with this. And it was unclear as to what exactly the steps were; but as things have unfolded, we have seen significant success over the past year.

And this was highlighted by my recent trip when I walked through the streets of Fallujah with three other Members of Congress. And I would have never thought that just even a month ago or two months ago a platoon of marines could even walk through the streets of Fallujah, much less four Members of Congress.

So as we walked through the streets, we saw shops that were open. Shop keepers were smiling, children were playing in the streets. There was a volleyball game going on on one block. Another block I saw some children playing soccer. There were families strolling through the streets and talking. And this clearly was a major change, a major departure from what we had seen just months ago in Fallujah.

And what we found out was that an Iraqi solution was being brought to bear in Fallujah, an Iraqi solution for security, which has allowed for security to grow throughout the city of Fallujah, creating an environment that's now allowing economic activity in that city.

Children are now back in school. We're seeing shops that are open, microlending programs are ongoing, and this is just tremendous success. And the hallmark of the plan that has been implemented by General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker is that you look at the circumstances in a particular local in Iraq, like Fallujah, or perhaps Ramadi or Tikrit, and work with the circumstances on the ground and make those institutions that are available work for the positive.

And what I mean by that is, what we have is a situation where, after getting security and working with the Iraqis to set up these joint security stations throughout the city of Fallujah, now we've got a provincial reconstruction team working in Fallujah. This is a team of civilians and military who are working on the political side of things, working to help build the political infrastructure from the ground up.

And now what we're seeing is tremendous success with this, with a sort of a grass roots movement. And I've said over and over, the most difficult thing is going to be to get the Iraqi central government to come to reconcile and to come to terms, because it's been a country that's been fraught with division. But it's going to be an Iraqi solution that will bring that together. And as this grass-root development happens in Fallujah, in Ramadi, in Tikrit and Mosul and other cities throughout Iraq and our communities throughout Iraq, we will see a coalescence of political activity which will put pressure on those central politicians to come forward. And that's part of the whole political process.

The Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq, the Sunni Deputy Prime Minister, his name is Salaam as Zobadaei, told us that you can look at the fruit, but the fruit will not come until you grow the tree. And that was a very, very, precise and visual way of describing what needs to happen. We need to see Iraqi institutions growing from the ground up, because then you'll have a sustainable government. To have an Iraqi Government impose from the top and to try to force it down is not sustainable. So I'm encouraged that this plan is working. We're seeing positive signs, and we need to give it further time.

These provincial reconstruction teams are doing an outstanding job. There are some 10 or 14, I believe, just in the Baghdad and Anbar area, and then one in each other province. And I think our State Department deserves tremendous credit for working under very difficult circumstances and putting these provincial reconstruction teams together to make this sort of political grass-roots movement occur.

And on the broader diplomatic front, we now know that the Saudis are looking at putting an embassy into Baghdad. Recently, the French Foreign Minister was in Baghdad and they expressed that the French want to play a bigger role. We need to have continued vigorous diplomacy to move forward to get debt relief on the Iraqi Government. And I believe if we move along on the diplomatic front, as I mentioned, on continuing to build this grass-roots political development internally in Iraq, economic development with microlending programs, all because we managed to get security, we're going to see a successful outcome in Iraq. And I think in short order we should be able to draw back down on our combat troops and offer more of a supportive role.

Mr. SHAYS. I wonder if the gentleman would yield a second.

Mr. BOUSTANY. I'd be happy to yield to my friend.

Mr. SHAYS. Just to point out to him that what you're encountering is significant. When the Iraqis say to us, be patient, give us more time, what I encountered early on was they were constantly blaming the other groups. The Shias would blame the Sunnis, the

Sunnis would blame the Kurds, and so on. But what they're starting to do is they're trying to say, we're trying to work out our differences; give us more time to work together. And that's a significant change.

I likened this to a sixth-grade dance when they first started out. They didn't know how to interact with each other. But they're starting to learn how to interact. They're starting to be defensive of Iraq and speaking more with one voice; and I think it's not an insignificant event that's taking place.

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Mr. BOUSTANY. I think the gentleman is absolutely correct. And if you look at Iraq, there were 27 ethnic groups in Iraq, hundreds of tribes, and this was all held together artificially under Saddam Hussein's reign of terror, so to speak. And now that is gone and they are trying to figure out how to reconcile all of this.

And there are signs that there is Iraqi nationalism. Look at what happened recently with their soccer team, which was a phenomenal event where everyone was celebrating in the streets. It truly showed that they have that sense of nationalism and pride in their country.

Mr. SHAYS. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. CARTER. I yield to the gentleman from Connecticut.

Mr. SHAYS. The Iraqis would say to me, How dare you say we are not a country. We are the Fertile Crescent where two great rivers have met. We have been the center of Western civilization. And for us to say they are not a real country, for them they find it very insulting.

Mr. BOUSTANY. That is absolutely true. They are a proud civilization.

And I am not at a point now where I am ready to preemptively declare defeat in this, and I do believe we need to give it time. I believe the plan is working. And for the first time since I have been in Congress, I have got a level of comfort that I believe we are on the right track. So I would urge patience in this. I do believe we will draw down some of our combat troops in the short term, and I am guardedly optimistic.

Mr. CARTER. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, as I was listening to everybody talk here and listening to people talk earlier today, I get struck by the history of this Chamber. And as I was sitting here, I wondered how often this debate had occurred during my lifetime or did it occur during my lifetime. I would like to think I am a student of history, but I will admit that my concentration on history from the end of the Second World War until I was in high school, there is a gap there where it is only kind of the history of me and not the history of the United States. So I don't know a lot about it, but I was thinking the Second World War in Europe ended in 1944. Germany was divided into zones, I believe, until 1952. So we actually were the government of a zone, as were Britain and

France, from 1944 to 1952. I wonder if this debate took place in this Congress during that period of time: Bring our troops home. Why don't those people stand up a government over there? Why can't they get their act together? I wonder if that debate took place. I don't know. I might go look it up and try to find out.

Japan we defeated in 1945, unconditional surrender. And yet MacArthur established the occupation of Japan and, in fact, was heavily criticized when the Korean War broke out for still being the czar of Japan. And occupation forces remained in Japan until some time in the mid 1950s. I wonder if that debate went on about Japan. The last time I checked, which was the day before yesterday when I was talking to some soldiers at Fort Hood, we still have troops in Korea, and that war technically ended in 1954 I believe it was, 1952 or 1954, and we still have troops there. And I don't know if during the 1950s we had debates about why can't those people get their act together? Why do we have to defend that country? Why do we have to defend them? I don't hear that debate anymore, and there are still American soldiers standing watch in Korea.

I am not saying that we are going to occupy for this period of time, but where is our commitment to the commitment that our soldiers have given us? That deeply concerns me. I worry about it. And I can tell you our fighting men and women worry about it too.

So I guess that is why we get up here on the floor of the House and we want to let the American people know what we saw and what we heard and what we experienced. And I know the fighting generation that are living today; those soldiers are a great generation. The question is, will we be also ranked as a great generation, the people back home, for standing behind this great generation as they have done an outstanding job in defeating our enemy.

THE NATIONAL DEBT AND THE WAR IN IRAQ

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. ROSS) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. ROSS. Mr. Speaker, this evening, as on most Tuesday evenings when Congress is in session, I rise on behalf of the fiscally conservative Democratic Blue Dog Coalition. We are a group of 47 conservative to moderate Democrats that simply want to come here, put an end to the partisan bickering, and restore common sense and fiscal discipline to our Nation's government.

This evening, as we begin this hour-long conversation, we are going to focus on Iraq, and specifically we are going to focus on how your tax dollars are being spent in Iraq.

You have heard a lot of talk this evening about Iraq. And I can assure

you as long as we have our men and women in uniform in harm's way, we are going to support them. They are doing everything that has been asked of them and then some. My brother-in-law is in the U.S. Air Force. He has been in the region several times. My first cousin is in the U.S. Army, and he is in Iraq this evening. It has affected all of us in one way or another. We have all had family or friends serve there.

This evening we are going to specifically focus on how your tax money is being spent in Iraq. For the last 5 years, the President has pretty much asked for a blank check, and if you ask him to be held accountable for how your tax money is spent in Iraq, he will tell you that you are unpatriotic. It is time that we stood up to this President and demanded the kind of accountability on how your tax money is being spent in Iraq just as we demand accountability from local and State governments when they receive a Federal grant. To put it another way, \$16 million of your tax money is being spent in Iraq every hour; \$16 million of your tax money is being spent in Iraq every hour. That is \$16 million an hour that can't go to replace the bridge in Minnesota that fell. And, by the way, there are thousands more structurally deficient bridges in this country, and this should have been a wake-up call for all of us to get about the business of rebuilding this Nation's infrastructure and begin to invest in America again.

Just in my congressional district during the month of August, some people think we go home and go on vacation for a month, but what we really do is we go home and see the people, which I think is an important part of this job. If you are going to represent folks, I think it is important you get out of Washington and you go home and you see them. And as I traveled my 29 counties and 150 towns in Arkansas's Fourth Congressional District, every town I went to I learned of a project, of a need. On the western side, they want to finish I-49, which can create jobs and economic opportunities. An interstate where construction started on it back when I was about 5 years old entering kindergarten. I am now 46 and have a daughter in college.

When I go to the eastern side of my district, I hear a lot of talk about wanting to complete I-69, which was announced 5 years before I was born. In the central part of the district, I hear a lot of talk about four-laning U.S. 82, four-laning 167, how we need money to invest in getting off the Sparta aquifer and having more and more commercial and residential people getting their water from other alternative water sources. As I traveled and toured Millwood Lake, I learned about how this wonderful recreational lake, a lake that contributed to the economy, it is now becoming very difficult to fish in about a quarter of it and they are worried about the rest of it. Why? Because of the neglect. The neglect in our

Nation's infrastructure, the neglect in our waterways, in our highways. And yet we continue to spend \$16 million an hour of your tax money in Iraq. Mr. Speaker, I say it is time to start investing in America again, and we are going to talk more about that this evening.

During the past 6 years, we have had a President that has given us the largest debt ever in our Nation's history, the largest deficit ever in our Nation's history, for the past 6 years, during the time that we had Republicans controlling the White House, the House and the Senate. We have passed a budget this year that will put us back in balance by 2012 and will begin to restore common sense and fiscal discipline to our Nation's government.

But this is what the new Democratic majority inherited in January: a debt that is \$8,993,600,200,089 and some change. That is a big number. What does it mean? If you break it out and divide it by every man, woman and child living in America, including those born today, each one of us, our share of the national debt: \$29,704. It is what those of us in the Blue Dog Coalition refer to as the "debt tax," d-e-b-t, which is one tax that cannot be repealed, that cannot be cut. And that is one of the reasons that we are not able to invest in America's priorities, investing in our homeland, investing in our veterans, investing in education, investing in rebuilding America's infrastructure. No. We are too busy paying interest on this debt.

Our Nation is borrowing about a billion dollars a day, but before we borrow a billion dollars today, we are going to spend a half billion today paying interest on the debt we have already got. That is above and beyond the \$16 million an hour that we are sending to Iraq, much of which goes unaccounted for.

So we are going to spend this hour addressing that and other issues surrounding Iraq. And I am absolutely delighted to be joined by a number of my Blue Dog colleagues. I mentioned there are 47 members in the Blue Dog Coalition, and I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the four newest members: CHRISTOPHER CARNEY from Pennsylvania's Tenth Congressional District, GABRIELLE GIFFORDS from Arizona's Eighth Congressional District, BART GORDON from Tennessee's Sixth Congressional District, and ZACH SPACE from Ohio's Eighteenth Congressional District.

At this time I am pleased to yield to a fellow Blue Dog, someone who has become very involved in this conservative-moderate Democratic movement on Capitol Hill, someone who is not afraid to take a stand for what is right, and that is my friend JOE DONNELLY from Indiana's Second Congressional District.

Mr. DONNELLY. Thank you, Mr. ROSS.

Mr. Speaker, it is a great honor to have the chance to speak here again in the House.